

Shining Sea: A Celebration of Marine Sanctuaries," which is currently on display in my District at the Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota, Florida. Due to the generous support of the National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation's Board of Directors and contributors, "From Sea to Shining Sea" is traveling the country, taking the wonders of our nation's thirteen underwater marine sanctuaries to communities from coast to coast.

The National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation was established in 2000 to support the education and outreach activities of the National Marine Sanctuaries Program, which Congress created in 1972 through the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act. Congress passed the Act in 1972 in response to growing awareness nationwide of the intrinsic environmental and cultural value of our coastal waters. This legislation has led to the designation of thirteen unique marine areas as National Marine Sanctuaries, which has ensured the conservation of these natural treasures through comprehensive resource management, education, and research.

As they provide a secure habitat for wildlife as well as a preservation zone for shipwrecks and prehistoric artifacts, our national marine sanctuaries serve as natural classrooms and laboratories. For example, as a result of the establishment of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in November 1990, my home state is assured of the continued protection of a marine ecosystem that contains the largest coral reef in the continental United States as well as one of the most diverse assemblages of underwater plants and animals in North America.

"From Sea to Shining Sea" features an original painting by renowned artist Robert Lyn Nelson, as well as touch screen, interactive, DVD video and exhibits that introduce visitors to all twelve national marine sanctuaries. This stunning exhibit will continue on display at the Mote Marine Laboratory through May 31, 2003.

Founded in 1955, Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium is a long time partner with the NOAA and the National Marine Sanctuary Program. Mote Aquarium educates and entertains almost 400,000 visitors per year, bringing the wonders of the marine world to visitors of all ages. Mote's Center for Tropical Research, located in Summerland Key, studies the coral reefs, other habitats, fauna and flora of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Mr. Speaker, I am especially proud to recognize artist Robert Lyn Nelson for his amazing contribution to this exhibit; Office of National Marine Sanctuaries Director Dan Basta, for his vision and dedication to our country's marine treasures; Ms. Lori Arguelles of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation for leading the public outreach effort; Superintendent Billy Causey of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary; Aquarium Director Dan Bebak; Mote Marine Laboratory Executive Director Dr. Kumar Mahadevan; and Mote Marine Laboratory Board of Trustees for their continued dedication to excellence in marine science, education and conservation.

TRIBUTE TO ARMY STAFF
SERGEANT JERRY CORTINAS

HON. SOLOMON P. ORTIZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. ORTIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Army Staff Sergeant Jerry Cortinas, born in Brownsville, who was badly wounded in Afghanistan fighting for the cause of freedom from tyranny, and ridding that nation of the infestation of al Qaeda forces that hijacked it for their evil purposes.

His uncle, Santiago Torres of Brownsville, says Jerry always wanted to do something important in his life. Now he has. He was already in National Guard at age 19 when he wanted to join the Customs Bureau like his uncle, but he was too young. So he just went and volunteered for the Army.

Jerry is an excellent soldier, a fact apparent to those who fought with him and who have known him since he returned.

He joined the Army's elite Special Forces and made his mark on the first defining war of the 21st Century with the Special Forces. After extensive training in the United States, he departed for Afghanistan.

Jerry was in a terrible accident in Afghanistan. During a drill with RPGs, rocket propelled grenades, one of them exploded, killing one soldier and causing painful damage to Jerry's body. He lost one of his hands, and has had extensive facial damage.

Jerry was in Walter Reed Army Hospital from December until February. He has since been transferred back to Ft. Bragg for rehabilitation. Like the good soldier he is, he wants to recover and remain in military.

He is a good young man who cares for his country and believes his contribution is important to our Nation.

I ask my colleagues to remember Jerry as he continues with his difficult struggle with a long rehabilitation. Please also remember his wife, Celina, and their two-year-old daughter, Dion, who are in Fayetteville, NC.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 1718, TO
REPEAL TERMS SPECIFIED BY
LAW FOR CERTAIN VA OFFICIALS

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I am introducing a bill to repeal the four-year terms specified by law for certain officials of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and to add a provision that addresses the appointment of directors of principal geographic service areas.

Fourteen years ago, when the Veterans Administration was established as an executive department and redesignated the Department of Veterans Affairs, Public Law 100-527 also established a Chief Medical Director (CMD), a Chief Benefits Director (CBD) and a Director of the National Cemetery Services (the Director). The CMD and the CBD were to be appointed by the President, with the advice and consent of the Senate, while the Director was to report to the Office of the Secretary.

Subsequent laws further restated and reorganized the three key executive positions in the Department as the Under Secretaries for Health, Benefits and Memorial Affairs. Under current law, the Under Secretaries for Health and Benefits are appointed for four-year terms, with reappointment permissible for successive-like periods. There is no such restriction or term provision established in law for the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs.

I am introducing H.R. 1718 to repeal term appointments for the Under Secretaries for Health and Benefits. This bill will align all three Under Secretary positions as Presidential appointments, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, and allow the President maximum flexibility in the appointment of these primary executive positions. Current incumbents would not be affected by the enactment of this legislation. The President would also be required to notify Congress concerning the reasons for removal if the President should choose to terminate or remove one of the Under Secretaries of the Department.

These term appointments likewise would be repealed for key officials assigned to the Office of the Under Secretary for Health, who are appointed by the Secretary subject to reassignment at the Secretary's discretion. With this bill, the designation of directors of principal geographic service areas are added to the group of key agency officials appointed by the Secretary and serving at the Secretary's discretion without term restrictions.

As with the three under secretaries, H.R. 1718 requires that the Secretary notify the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House and Senate when one of these key officials is removed from one of these subsidiary positions. These officials may be entitled to reassignment, if they held a previous career position within the Department.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation would allow the President and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs maximum flexibility to hold senior officials accountable and to align the agency's top leadership with the vision and goals of the Secretary and the Administration. I urge prompt House action on this important measure.

VETERANS BENEFITS

HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 10, 2003

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, our nation's veterans have fought to protect our freedoms and the way of life we cherish. Unfortunately, when their service is done and they retire, our military personnel are too often excluded from the American Dream they fought to preserve.

We all know that military pay does not compare to private sector wages. After retirement, thousands of veterans cannot afford to purchase a home because their military pensions do not cover the cost of a mortgage payment.

Because of this inequity, the Veterans Administration instituted a home loan program to assist veterans achieve the dream of home ownership. While this is a commendable program, the maximum loan amount is often not enough to purchase a home—particularly in regions with high real-estate markets.